



N. Bogdanov

# LENIN'S SMILE







Nikolai Bogdanov

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Translated from the Russian

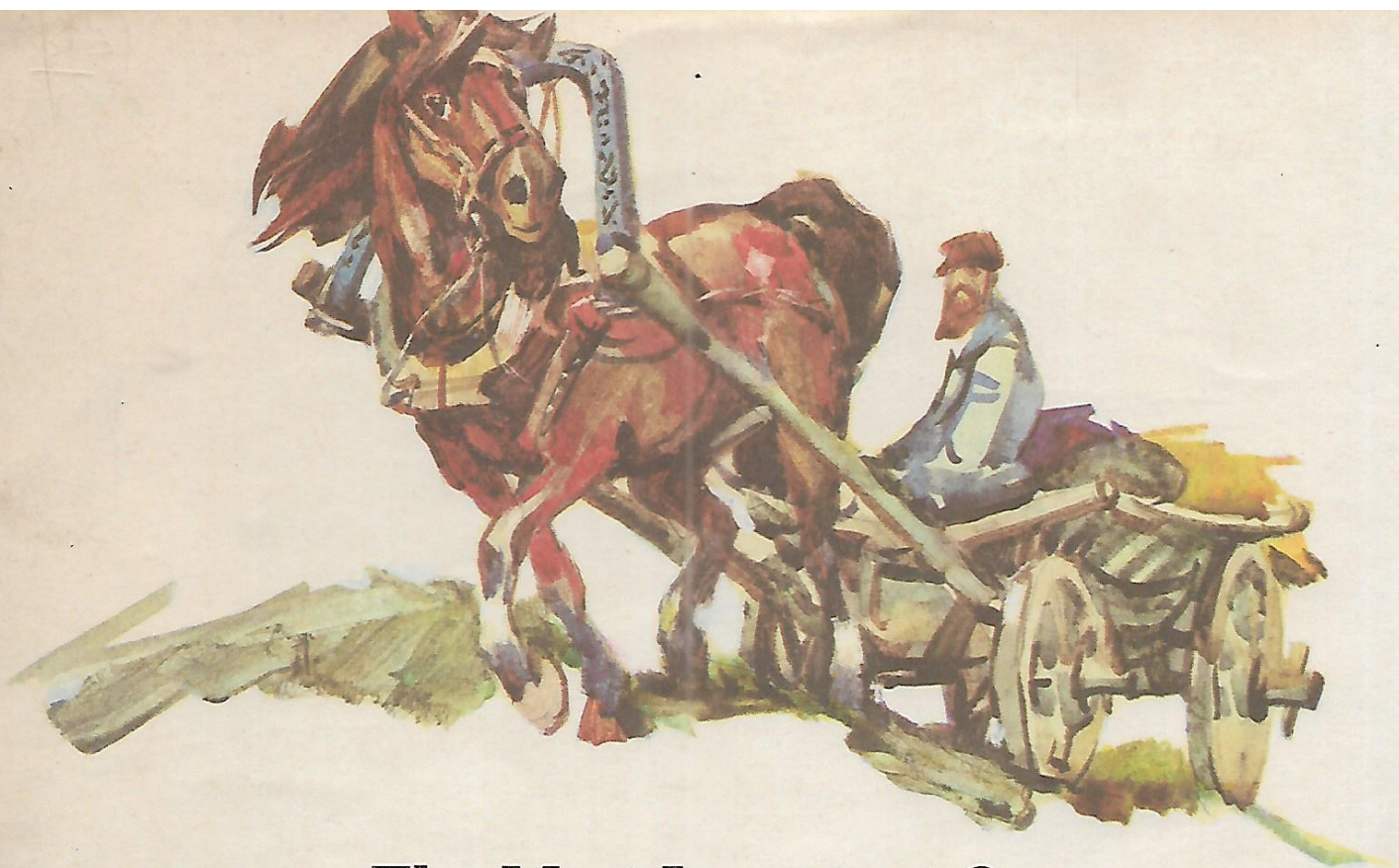
Drawings by *I. Ushakov*



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## The Most Important One

Volodya Ulyanov, just like any other child, was often bothered by questions such as: who is the biggest? Who is the strongest? Who's the most important one in the world?

He liked to find things out for himself. In the beginning, he discovered that a horse was the strongest of all. It could be harnessed to a wagon and could pull the whole family: his father, his mother, his sisters and brothers, and him. The driver was its master. He would shout: "Giddiyap!" and the horse would start off.

Then Volodya was taken to the circus and discovered that an elephant was the biggest of all. It was as huge as a mountain. There was a little pavilion on its back and inside it were real, live monkeys dressed in fancy clothes. The clown was their master. But then the elephant wound its huge trunk around the clown and carried him off, making everyone laugh. No, the clown was not the most important one.

Soon Volodya discovered that there was something bigger than an elephant, and that was a steamboat. It did



not move on land, it sailed down the river. Its water-wheels made more noise than the geese in the pond, more noise than an elephant.

- One day the boat sailed up to the bank and let off some steam. The sound was so loud it scared the horses on the bank, but Volodya was not frightened, because he was with his elder brother, Sasha, who wasn't afraid of anything.

The passengers began embarking. The boat was probably tired of waiting for everyone to take his place, because it whistled so loudly it hurt your ears. Then it lurched and nearly pulled the town off, for someone had forgotten to untie the mooring line. The line was wound around a large post. When the boat moved it made the pier sway. Men began running and shouting. A sailor untied the mooring line, and the boat moved away. The town remained on the bank.

The people were happy to see that everything had ended well and waved their hankies at each other. Many of them were smiling. Some were even weeping.





It was a big boat with many cabins where one could have tea from a samovar. And jam and buns, too.

Mamma was pouring tea. Papa was reading a newspaper. His sister Anya was keeping an eye on him. It was all terribly boring. The only thing of interest was the silver spoon in Papa's glass. It kept going "ping, ping" softly. And the floor trembled.

When everyone was having tea, Volodya slipped off the couch and listened to the boat breathing. Something was thumping inside it, just like it did inside a person. He would have liked to make a little hole and peep inside. But he had once made a hole in his hobby-horse and found out that there was only sawdust inside. He now wondered how he could find out what was inside the boat.

"What do you want to know?" Sasha asked.

Volodya had pressed his ear against Sasha's chest and was listening to the sound. Something was going "thump-thump" inside.

"That's my heart," Sasha said, for he had guessed what was bothering Volodya. "And the boat has an engine inside."

An engine. Ah, how Volodya wished he could see it!

He had popped out of the cabin and onto the deck several times, but each time someone had made him go back inside, saying, "Will you never sit still!"

On one of these excursions Volodya had gotten as far as an iron door. He could feel the blast of heat coming from behind it and hear the clatter and roar inside. He was just about to climb down the iron ladder when the captain spotted him and shouted:

"You're not allowed in the engine-room!"

"I just want to have a peak!"

"No, no. Can't you see the sign? It says 'No admittance.' I don't even go down there." The captain looked around and then shouted: "Whose child is this?"

His sisters came running. They made him go back and complained to Mamma, so he was made to sit quietly on the couch for a long time.

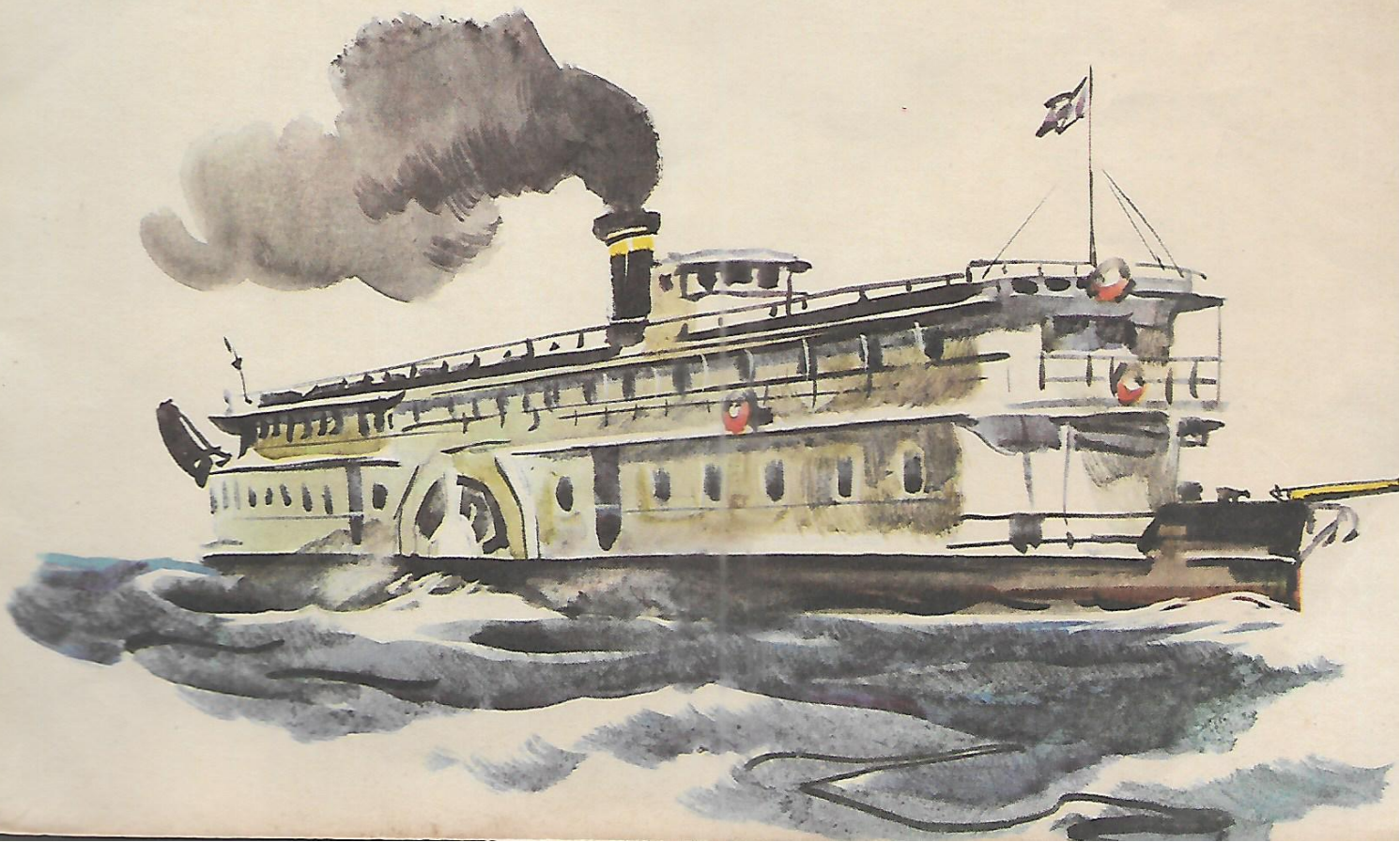


That night the sandman put everyone to sleep. Volodya pretended to fall asleep, too, but he tricked the sandman and slipped out on deck.

Now no one was in his way. Even the deck passengers were asleep, with their heads resting on their sacks, crates and bags. The boat sailed down the river, sending waves up onto the banks. In the quiet of the night Volodya could hear something pounding and sighing deep inside the boat. It was the engine. It sounded as if it were cramped down there below. Sometimes it would turn over with such force it made the boat shudder. At such times the bell on the bow would clang all by itself.

Volodya went down to the lower deck and from there to the middle of the boat where the huge black stack began. It kept getting hotter and hotter. Everything was hot there, even the handrails. Suddenly, Volodya saw a light. It was coming from below and making its way up through an open grate.

Volodya stood on tiptoe and looked down. A blast of hot air hit him in the face and ruffled his hair. That's how hard the engine was breathing. He mustered his courage









and looked at it. It was far down below and was huge and grey, and bigger than an elephant. Its great steel arms went back and forth, back and forth, making all the noise.

So that was the great force that made the boat move!

At first, Volodya could not understand how an engine could move a boat. Then he spotted a man down below. He had on a grease-stained shirt and was wearing a cap. He was holding a tea kettle with a very long spout in one hand and a greasy rag in the other.

The man was giving the engine a drink, just like a kind master. He would give it a couple of sips, watch it drink and then wipe away the spilled drops carefully with his rag. Volodya leaned on the hinged grate to get a better look and it squeaked. The man looked up. His face was glistening. Indeed, it was very hot down there.

The engine's master was not angry at the boy who had come to have a look at him so late at night when everyone else was sleeping. He smiled at Volodya and nodded. Then he patted the engine, as if to show Volodya that it obeyed him, and said something.

But Volodya couldn't hear him above the noise of the engine and said, "Who are you?"

"He's a worker. He's the machinist," Sasha suddenly said. He had been right behind Volodya all the time, because he had wanted to see where his little brother was going and what it was he wanted to discover.

"Look, Sasha, there he is!" Volodya shouted into his ear and pointed at the brave and friendly man. "I've found him!"

"You mean the most important one? That's fine! And now, let's go back to our cabin. It's very late." Sasha took his hand and led him off.

Volodya did not resist. He was very pleased. He had discovered what he had been trying to find out. And he had found it out all by himself.





## A Man's Tracks

One day Volodya and his brother Sasha were walking through the woods, following the faint tracks of someone who had gone there before them. The grass had sprung back, and the man's tracks had long since filled in with fallen leaves and pine needles. Sometimes they had to guess where the trail was by the markers the man had left. In one place he had left a cup made of birch bark hanging over a spring which he had cleared of sticks and stones. One could stop to drink here. In another place he had laid some branches over a boggy stream. One could cross here and not get wet. In a third place he had dragged away a large, dangling oak branch ripped off by a storm.

Sasha frowned as they walked on. He had chosen a short cut to the forester's hut where the family had stopped over for the day. The Ulyanovs had come to the



woods to pick mushrooms. And now Sasha knew he was lost.

"I'll find the way sooner or later," he said to himself, "but I'm afraid Volodya will be all in." He looked at his younger brother anxiously and was surprised to see him smiling, even though he was tired and overheated.

"What are you so happy about?" Sasha said.

"Didn't you notice anything?" Volodya said. He looked mysterious. "Don't you think it is nice to know that a very kind person passed here before us? Look at all the good things he left for others."

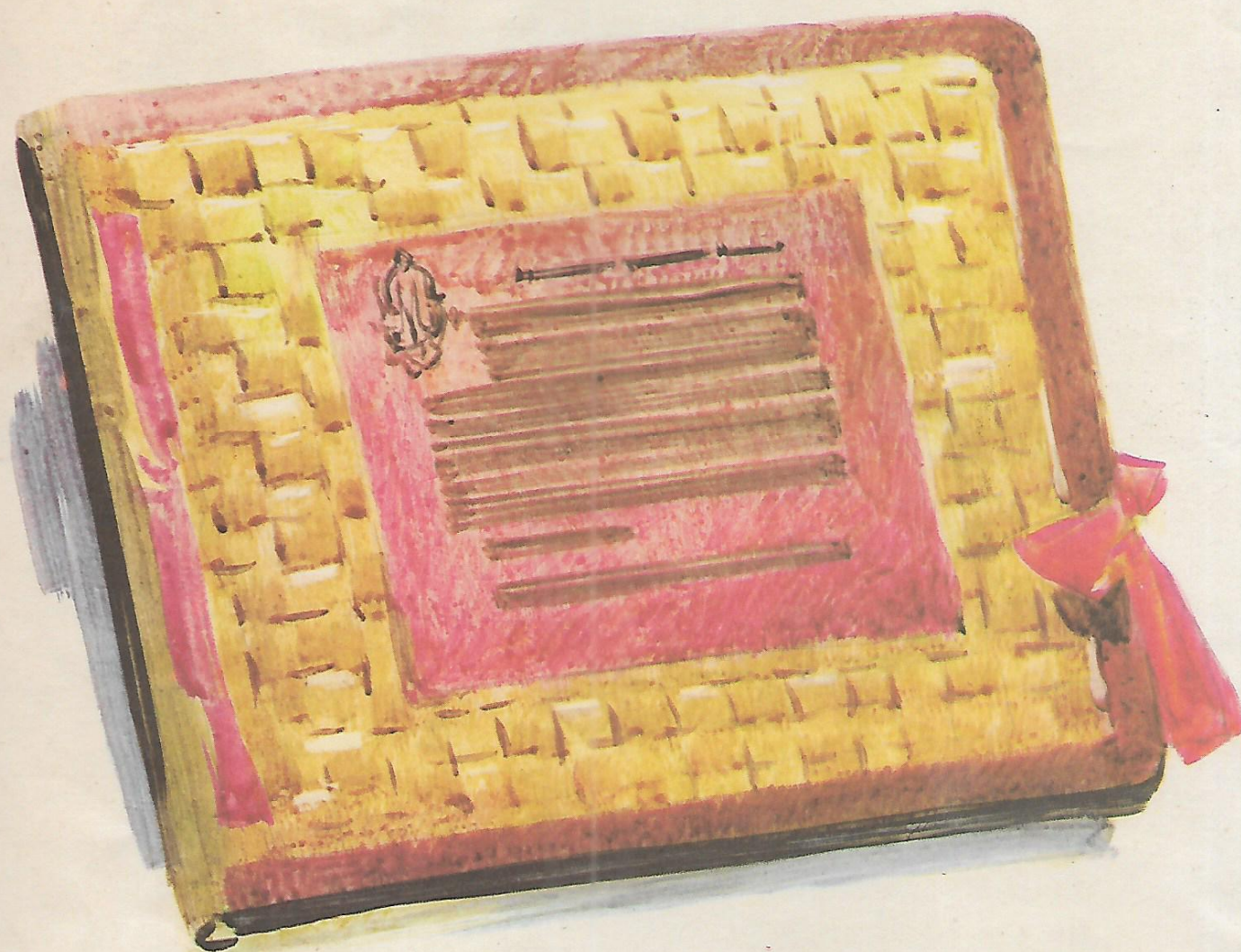
Sasha stopped in his tracks. He was amazed. He never imagined his little brother could think in such a grown-up way. And as soon as he thought that he felt ashamed of himself, because one never does really appreciate a younger brother.

He put his arm around Volodya and then, after a moment's silence, he said something that Volodya was to remember:

"That's how one has to go through life, Volodya, leaving a trail of good deeds behind."







## Lenin's Smile

This is what Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and comrade, wrote to a group of Young Pioneers:

"In 1922 Young Pioneers in the town of Vyatka sent Lenin, who was very ill at the time, their gifts: these were



drawings, flowers and things they had made in arts and crafts.

"I set them out in the large room on the second floor next to Lenin's room, and whenever he passed them he would look at the presents and smile."

One day recently I took a group of Young Pioneers to the house where Lenin lived and which is now a museum. They looked at those gifts and some of them laughed, saying they were so simply made and so poor-looking. One of the boys pointed to an album with a canvas cover and said,

"Now I know why Lenin smiled. Just looking at presents like these made him laugh!"

But he was wrong. Nadezhda Konstantinovna said it made Lenin feel good to look at them. He was especially pleased because they had been made by the children themselves, and no matter that they were not professional-looking.

There are many fine and beautiful gifts in the shops, but you can't buy a present like the ones the children made for Lenin for any amount of money, because they were made with love.

These simple gifts were a message for Lenin. They told him that in far-off Vyatka, in a place where the tsarist government used to send revolutionaries into exile, there were now boys and girls in red Pioneer ties who loved him, were concerned about him and believed in his cause.

Lenin was especially pleased by the letter the Young Pioneers of Vyatka had enclosed with their gifts. He believed



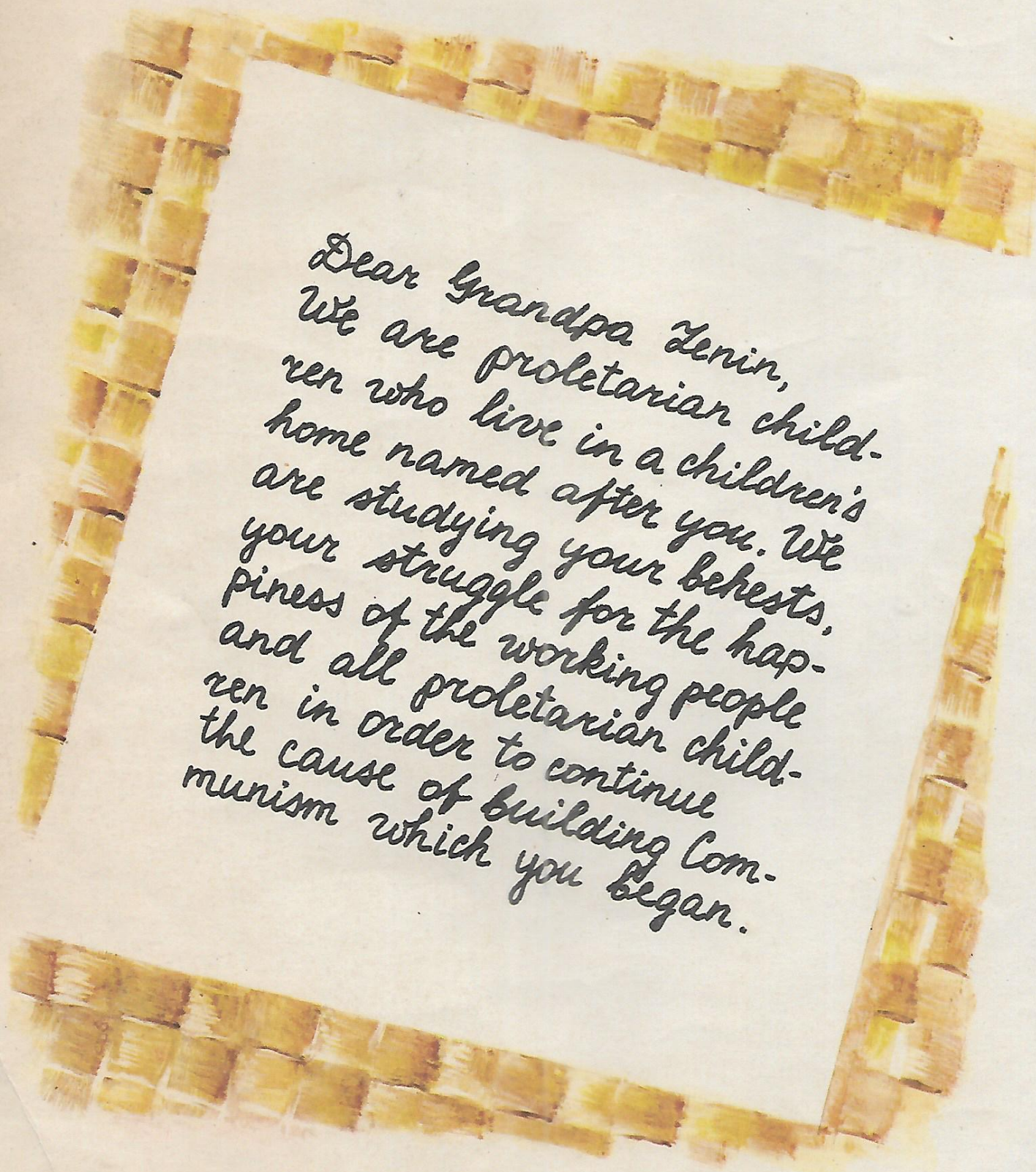








that these fine children would one day grow up to be good Communists.



Dear Grandpa Lenin,  
We are proletarian children who live in a children's home named after you. We are studying your behests, your struggle for the happiness of the working people and all proletarian children in order to continue the cause of building Communism which you began.





## The Mysterious Letter

Nearly all of Lenin's letters to his friends, comrades, family and acquaintances, to workers and peasants have been collected and are kept in a large building in the centre of Moscow. They are the property of the nation.

Many scholars have studied them, and now we know when, why and to whom each letter was written.

However, there is one letter which is very unusual. It looks like a strange illustration and is drawn in indian ink on a piece of birch bark. There are no proper letters in it, for it is made up of pictures of men, animals, objects, etc.

Volodya Ulyanov drew this letter when he was twelve years old. He sent it to his friend Boris Farmakovsky, whose family had moved away from Simbirsk (which is now the city of Ulyanovsk) to Orenburg.

When the friends parted they had apparently agreed to correspond, imitating the Indian way of using totemic



symbols, for this would be much more fun and, besides, they had their own secrets they didn't want anyone else to know about.

This mysterious letter was found among the Ulyanov and Farmakovsky families' correspondence. At the time Volodya's father forwarded it to Orenburg, he wrote the following accompanying note: "Volodya is expecting the letter Boris promised to write him." That is all that was known about it.

For a long time no one knew what the mysterious letter was about. Then one day V. Istrin, an engineer, became interested in it. He compared Volodya's letter to the published findings of ancient Indian totemic symbols used in writing and was thus able to decipher it. Istrin believes that the crayfish, samovar, stork, spur, frog and boar apparently refer to the names Volodya and his friends used when they played Indians. The lines drawn from these six to the blackbearded man in the pond mean that their request is addressed to him. What was it?

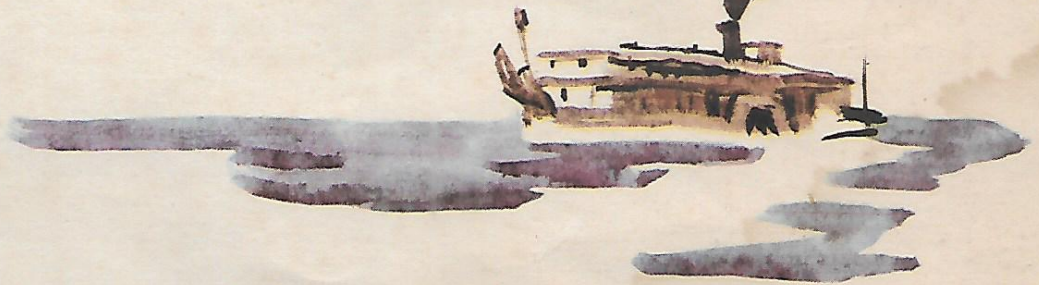
Having become very hungry after hunting (see the six armed warriors, the bear, the birds on the wing and, below, six faces with open mouths bent over two sausages, a pitcher and a plate of food), the boys seem to be saying to the man: "See how hungry we are? Get out of the pond, hurry home and give us some dinner." And what will happen if he doesn't? You can guess by looking at the figure in the top, right-hand corner: if we don't have something to eat we will die!

We think this is one of the most likely explanations of Volodya's mysterious letter.



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Н. Богданов  
УЛЫБКА ИЛЬИЧА

*На английском языке*

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